

## **Texas Democrats with Disabilities**

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The Honorable Stephanie Klick  
Chairwoman House Committee on Elections  
Texas House of Representatives  
P.O. Box 2910  
Austin, TX 78768-2910  
Via E-Mail: [Stephanie.Klick@house.texas.gov](mailto:Stephanie.Klick@house.texas.gov)

Re: Committee on Elections Interim Charges No. 2

*2. Make recommendations for establishing best practices for conducting an election during a declared disaster. Examine model legislation and statutes from other states pertaining to voting during a declared disaster when polls are inaccessible.*

Dear Chairwoman Klick:

Texas Democrats with Disabilities is the disability constituency caucus of the Texas Democratic Party. We are a statewide Democratic disability organization working to ensure that Texans with disabilities are fairly represented in our state. Thank you for the opportunity to provide written comments on the above mentioned interim charge during the coronavirus pandemic. Please accept our input on Charge 2.

Like other citizens of the United States, Texas Democrats with Disabilities believe that voting is fundamental to our democracy; it is necessary for fair and equal representation. We also understand the grave responsibilities that you, our state representatives, shoulder to uphold our nation's most cherished democratic principles. And we know that this is particularly true of the Texas House Committee on Elections and your admirable commitment to honor, encourage, and protect the right of every eligible Texan to vote.

Unfortunately, in the recent past, the right to vote was not always protected for disabled people. We faced significant social and infrastructural barriers that hindered this most basic democratic act of political expression. When we factor in race, gender, income inequality, and institutionalization, we find that our right to vote remains compromised. A deadly pandemic and other natural disasters (for example, the destruction wrought by Hurricane Laura to our rural communities along the eastern Gulf Coast) compound these well-documented systemic obstacles to civic participation. In order to avoid repeating our shameful past, when disabled people were

denied the vote, especially given the severe risks to health, it is past time that our great state modernizes its election process. Voting for disabled people of *all* backgrounds should be made fair—that is, we need to expand accessibility to meet our needs by removing convoluted bureaucratic red tape.

Many of our legislators in Texas have proudly dedicated their political careers to rehabilitating bureaucratic dysfunction. As disabled people, we *hear* you; we have firsthand experience with this. We respectfully request that the members of the Texas House Committee on Elections extend that dedication to the elimination of unjust barriers to voting regularly encountered by Texans with disabilities. We respectfully propose the following recommendations:

1. Evaluate successful blueprints from the five states that have implemented universal vote-by-mail (these states are Colorado, Hawaii, Oregon, Utah, and Washington).
2. Voting information on all elections needs to be uniform across the state; it should be provided in an accessible format on the Secretary of State's internet website (as well as *all* county websites); the cost will be minimal compared to the cost of voter disenfranchisement.
3. Ensure that residents in congregate facilities including but not limited to nursing homes and jails can exercise their right to vote;
4. Implement online voter registration to make it less cumbersome. After all, if a person can safely and easily renew a license or pay taxes online, there is no reason why this should not extend to voter registration.
5. Finally, the aforementioned problems could be removed by establishing universal vote by mail in Texas. This would help to ensure that voters with disabilities or those for whom travel is difficult could exercise their fundamental right to participate fully in our great democracy.

Texas Democrats with Disabilities respectfully requests that Chairwoman Klick and all members of the Texas House Committee on Elections consider these comments when issuing your interim report.

Sincerely,

Texas Democrats with Disabilities